

S. C. Ashby House
642 Dearborn St.
Helena
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-21

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

S.C. ASHBY HOUSE

HABS No. MT-21

ADDRESS: 642 Dearborn St., Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

OWNER: Thomas D. Tobin

OCCUPANT: Thomas D. Tobin

USE: Residence

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Shirley C. Ashby was one of the leading financiers and citizens of early-day Helena. He came to Montana in 1867, and was employed by I. G. Baker & Bros. of Fort Benton to help in their Indian trade.

In 1870, Ashby moved to Helena where he engaged in the real estate and insurance business until 1889, when he opened a store selling agricultural implements, wagons and carriages. In 1892, Ashby became president of the Helena National Bank.

This house was built by Ashby in 1886, for a reported price of \$15,000. It remained the Ashby residence until 1903, when Senator Thomas H. Carter became the owner.

Carter came to Montana in 1882 and began the practice of law. He was active in politics, and was the last Territorial delegate to Congress from Montana and the first elected representative to Congress after Montana attained statehood. Later Carter also served two terms as U. S. senator from Montana.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Shirley C. Ashby was born in Virginia, and came to Fort Benton, Montana, in 1867, at the age of twenty-four. He was employed as a clerk by

I. G. Baker & Co., a firm of pioneer merchants, and became their expert in dealing with the Indians. Because of his ability, he was eventually given an interest in the business.

Ashby moved to Helena in 1870, where he engaged in a real estate and insurance business. He also served as County Assessor for five years during this period. In 1889, Ashby sold his real estate business and, in conjunction with Col. Charles Broadwater, opened a store specializing in selling agricultural implements, wagons and carriages. In 1892, he was named president of the Helena National Bank.

This house was built in 1886, during the period when Ashby was a realtor. The Helena Weekly Herald reported that it was to cost \$15,000, but it almost certainly exceeded that. It was one of Helena's finest mansions at the time of construction.

In 1903, Ashby sold the house to Senator Thomas C. Carter, another of Helena's illustrious citizens. Carter moved to Montana in 1882, opened a law office and entered politics. He had the distinction of being both Montana's last Territorial delegate to Congress (elected in 1888), and the first to be elected to the House of Representatives (in 1889) after Montana became a state.

Carter was defeated in his bid for another Congressional term, but President Benjamin Harrison appointed him Commissioner of the General Land Office in Washington in 1891. He served in this office about a year, then returned to Montana to resume his law practice. On July 1, 1892, Carter became chairman of the Republican National Committee. In 1897, Carter returned to Washington, this time as Senator from Montana. He was a strong administration supporter during the two terms he served in the Senate. During his second term, he was chairman of the Census Committee and also fathered the postal savings bank bill.

In March, 1901, President McKinley appointed Mr. Carter as Commissioner of the St. Louis Exposition.

When the Board of Commissioners met, Carter was chosen as its president.

Thomas Carter died in 1911, and the next year his widow sold this house to C. B. Power, son of T. C. Power(see MT-28), another pioneer business man of Montana. There was some remodeling done at that time. Mrs. Thomas D. Tobin is a daughter of C. B. Power, so the house has remained in the same family since 1912.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

- Campbell, William C., From the Quarries of Last Chance Gulch, Montana Record Publishing Co., Helena, vol. I, 1951.
- Hamilton, James M., From Wilderness to Statehood, Binford and Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1957.
- Helena Independent (newspaper), Helena, Montana, Sept. 18, 1911; June 3, 1924.
- Helena Weekly Herald (newspaper), Helena, Montana, October 7, 1886.
- Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1894.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Ashby residence is one of the few among the numerous mansions in Helena built in the mid 1880's-1890's that is inhabited by a single family today. Neither suffering from having been cleaved into apartments nor adapted to the needs of a church or other organizations, it can present a better picture of the luxurious life of Montana's early millionaires.

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 53' x 61', three stories.

Foundation - native gray granite.

Wall Construction - brick, with decorative wood in the gable ends and a bedroom projection; stone arches.

Porches - three. The one now considered the

front porch on the south is 10' deep and 30' wide and is a two story open porch. The original carriage entrance is located in the north-east corner of the building and is distinguished by two stone Romanesque arches defining the porch and meeting and being supported by a single classical column of polished native porphyry. This porch, 7' x 7', is actually recessed into the building proper. The third porch is located on the west side of the building adjacent to the kitchen. This is a two story porch, 22' x 9'; the first story is open, the second story is closed.

Openings - Entrances: The main or carriage entrance is a single hardwood panel door with a stained glass light. The present front door entry is a solid paneled door.

Windows: D.H. 1/1 wood sash; D.H. 21/1 units plus D.H. 6/1 units in the third floor area where the dormer windows are D.H. 15/1 units; stained glass rectangular unit in carriage entrance foyer; grand hall has a triple window unit of a fixed D.H. 1/1 units with a horizontal transom above -- all are stained glass lights; bay window unit in the sitting room or second parlor. The parlor has two D.H. 1/1 units set in a stone arched opening, and they have an arched transom of stained glass.

Roof - gable roof, pitch approximately 45°, wood shingled.

Chimney - brick.

INTERIOR

Some modernization took place about 1911 when the west porch was added off of the kitchen. The kitchen appears to have been updated since then -- otherwise the spaces, trim, and surface materials remain the same, and they are beautifully maintained by the present owner.

Floor Plan - Entering by way of the original carriage entrance, one comes into a small vestibule lighted by a stained glass window. A door with a stained glass light and flanked by similar lights leads into the grand hall from which access is gained to the living room, parlor, den, dining room, and kitchen. The open staircase to the second floor takes up a good share of the west wall of the room.

The second floor contains a main landing-hall and two large bedrooms, each with its own bath, and a library or study. A smaller hall leads to the servants' quarters (above the kitchen area) that contains two rooms and a bath.

The third floor contains five rooms and a bath.

Fireplaces - There are six fireplaces in the building. A white marble is located on the north wall of the parlor. The den and dining room have paneled fireplace frontal pieces, and there are fireplaces in each of the two large bedrooms and library on the second floor. These have a white tile mantel, frontal piece and hearth.

Stairway - open oak staircase to the second floor.

Floor - oak T & G.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - plaster; wallpaper; wainscot of hardwood in the grand hall and stairway; paneled wood ceiling in dining room; partially paneled mahogany walls and built-ins.

Doors - hardwood panel doors.

Trim - oak, elaborately moulded.

Hardware - brass.

Lighting - gas; now electric.

Heating - steam.

OTHER

General Setting - The property occupies a full city block. The residence is located near the southeast corner of the lot with a large back yard.

Enclosures - granite fence.

Outbuildings - A 26' x 44' garage, and a 12' x 31' shed, both brick like the main building, are located west of the house.

Prepared by, John DeHaas
December 1967

Reviewed by Eleni Silverman, HABS
September 1983